

Predatory Journal Audit Checklist

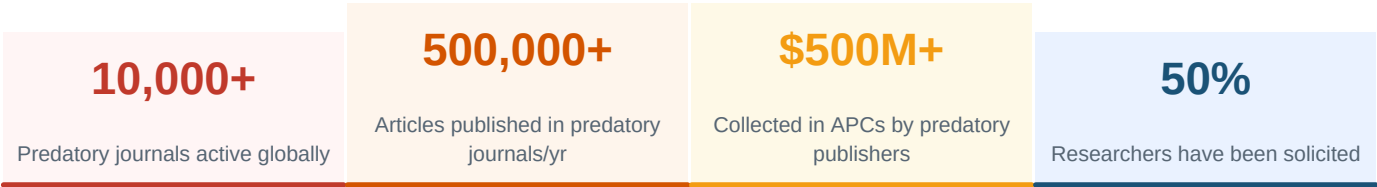
How to Identify, Avoid & Escape Predatory Journals

For Researchers · Journal Editors · University Librarians · Publishers · Indexing Applicants

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OJS Expert & Crossref Ambassador | SSP Member
62+ Journals Launched | 30+ Scopus Indexed

What is a Predatory Journal? A predatory journal is one that claims to be legitimate scholarly publishing but prioritizes fee collection over genuine peer review, editorial standards, and ethical publishing. They exploit the Open Access model and damage researchers' careers and institutional reputations. This checklist helps you audit any journal — yours or one you're considering submitting to — against proven warning signs.



SECTION 1: Publisher & Journal Identity Red Flags

How to use: Tick each box if you observe this warning sign. The more boxes ticked, the higher the predatory risk. **Red flags** = serious concern | **Orange** = verify further | **Green** = good sign

Publisher Transparency

- ■ No verifiable physical address or location listed for the publisher

■ Legitimate publishers have real, verifiable office addresses — not P.O. boxes or vague country mentions
- ■ Publisher claims to be based in a prestigious country but has no verifiable presence there

■ e.g., claims 'USA' or 'UK' address but no evidence of real operations
- ■ Publisher name is suspiciously similar to a well-known legitimate publisher

■ e.g., 'Elseiver', 'Springer-Open', 'Wiley Plus' — deliberate misspellings to confuse
- ■ No 'About' or 'Publisher' page with real contact information

■ Real publishers are proud of who they are and make contact easy
- ■ Contact email uses Gmail, Yahoo, or other free email services

■ Legitimate publishers always use domain-based email (e.g., editor@journalname.com)
- ■ Website has poor design, broken links, placeholder text, or copied content

■ Predatory publishers invest little in web presence quality
- ■ Publisher claims to own hundreds of journals across all subjects

■ Mega-publishers covering every possible subject area with no subject expertise is a red flag

ISSN & Journal Registration

- ■ Journal claims an ISSN but it cannot be verified on portal.issn.org
 - *Every legitimate ISSN is registered and verifiable at the official ISSN portal*
- ■ Journal uses a fake or fabricated ISSN number
 - *Common trick — easy to check at portal.issn.org (free search)*
- ■ Journal changes its name frequently while keeping the same ISSN
 - *Legitimate journals rarely rename — frequent name changes indicate instability or evasion*
- ■ Journal is not registered in any bibliographic database (not even Google Scholar)
- ■ Journal falsely claims to be indexed in Scopus, WoS, or PubMed
 - *Always verify indexing claims directly on the database website — never trust the journal's own claim*

SECTION 2: Peer Review & Editorial Process Red Flags

Review Timeline & Process

- ■ Article accepted within 24–72 hours of submission with no substantive feedback
 - *Genuine peer review takes weeks to months. Instant acceptance = no review*
- ■ Acceptance email received before any reviewer comments or revisions requested
 - *Real peer review always generates reviewer feedback, even for strong papers*
- ■ Journal claims peer review but offers 'rapid publication' in days
 - *Rapid publication and genuine peer review are mutually exclusive in most cases*
- ■ Reviewers are never disclosed (even anonymously) and there is no review process transparency
- ■ Author can pay extra to 'fast track' their article through review
 - *Paying to accelerate review fundamentally compromises the review's integrity*
- ■ Journal accepts articles in topics completely outside its stated scope
 - *A chemistry journal accepting psychology articles has no genuine review process*
- ■ No documented peer review process on the journal website
 - *Legitimate journals describe exactly how they conduct review — double blind, single blind, open, etc.*

Editorial Board Issues

- ■ Editorial board members cannot be verified — no ORCID, no institutional profile
 - *Real researchers have verifiable digital identities. Unverifiable editors = fabricated board*
- ■ Editors are listed without their consent (discovered via complaints online)
 - *Many legitimate researchers have found their names listed on predatory journal boards without permission*
- ■ Editorial board members are students, non-researchers, or have no publications
 - *Credible journals have credible editors with active publication records in the field*
- ■ Same people serve as editors on dozens of predatory journals simultaneously
- ■ Editor-in-Chief has no publications in the journal's subject area
 - *The EiC should be a recognized expert in the field — verify on Google Scholar or Scopus*

- Editorial board is entirely from one country or institution

■ *International diversity is expected and evaluated by all major indexes*

SECTION 3: Article Processing Charges (APC) Red Flags

Important clarification: Not all journals that charge APCs are predatory — DOAJ-listed and Scopus-indexed journals also charge APCs. The red flags below are about **how** the APC is handled, not the mere existence of a fee.

- APC amount is not disclosed before submission — revealed only after acceptance

■ *Ethical journals disclose all fees upfront. Hiding fees until after acceptance is a trap*

- Journal sends unsolicited email invitations to submit with excessive flattery

■ *Phrases like 'esteemed researcher', 'outstanding work', 'we invite your valuable research'*

- APC waiver is automatically offered as soon as you question the fee

■ *Predatory journals care only about volume — they'll waive fees to get submissions*

- Journal changes its APC after submission or acceptance

■ *Any retroactive change in fee is unethical and a strong warning sign*

- No clear refund policy if article is rejected after payment

■ *Some journals collect fees and then 'accept' everything to avoid refunds*

- Journal has no information about what the APC covers (hosting, DOI, copyediting, etc.)

- Journal pressures authors to pay immediately with urgent deadlines

■ *Urgency tactics ('pay within 24 hours or lose your slot') are manipulation*

SECTION 4: Published Content & Quality Red Flags

- Published articles contain obvious grammatical, spelling, or formatting errors

■ *Legitimate journals employ copyediting. Error-filled articles indicate no quality control*

- Articles are published without abstracts, keywords, or author affiliations

■ *Basic metadata is non-negotiable. Missing it indicates no standards enforcement*

- Same article published simultaneously in multiple journals (duplicate publication)

■ *Predatory journals don't check for prior publication or plagiarism*

- Retracted articles remain on the journal website without retraction notice

■ *A journal's handling of retractions reveals its commitment to scientific integrity*

- Journal publishes articles from wildly unrelated disciplines in the same issue

■ *A legitimate journal has a defined scope and peer review expertise — it cannot review everything*

- No DOI assigned to published articles, or DOIs do not resolve

■ *All credible journals assign and deposit DOIs. Non-resolving DOIs indicate no Crossref membership*

- PDFs are scanned images — not searchable, indexable, or accessible

■ *Machine-readable PDFs are a basic standard. Image-only PDFs cannot be indexed or cited properly*

- Copyright assigned to the journal but Open Access claimed simultaneously

■ *Open Access requires keeping copyright with the author under a CC license*

■ ■ No author guidelines published — anyone can submit anything in any format

■ ■ Published articles never cite external sources (only internal journal citations)

■ *Abnormally high self-citation rate is a manipulation tactic for fake metrics*

SECTION 5: Fake Indexing & Metrics Deception

This is where researchers get most deceived. Predatory journals fabricate or misrepresent their indexing status and Impact Factor claims. Always verify every claim independently — never trust what the journal says about itself.

- **Journal claims 'Impact Factor' from a fake or unrecognised organisation**
 - *The ONLY legitimate Impact Factor is from Clarivate (Journal Citation Reports). Any other 'IF' — Global Impact Factor, Universal Impact Factor, etc. — is fake*
- **Scopus indexing cannot be verified at scopus.com/sources**
 - *Verify at: scopus.com/sources — search the exact journal title*
- **Web of Science listing cannot be verified at mjl.clarivate.com**
 - *The Master Journal List (MJL) is the official WoS verification source*
- **PubMed/MEDLINE listing cannot be verified at ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nlmcatalog**
 - *Search the NLM Catalog directly — don't trust the journal's claim*
- **DOAJ listing cannot be verified at doaj.org**
 - *Predatory journals frequently claim DOAJ listing without actually being listed*
- **Journal displays logos of real indexing databases without being listed**
 - *Using Scopus, WoS, or PubMed logos is a common deception tactic*
- **Journal claims h-index or CiteScore values that cannot be verified on Scopus**
 - *Real CiteScores are publicly visible on scopus.com/sources for all indexed journals*
- **Journal has a SJR score from scimago.org but is not in Scopus**
 - *SCImago only ranks Scopus-indexed journals. Any claimed SJR must be verifiable on scimago.org*
- **Journal uses fabricated statistics like 'Acceptance Rate: 15%' with no verifiable source**

SECTION 6: Ethics, COPE & Compliance Red Flags

- **No ethics policy, publication ethics statement, or COPE compliance mentioned**
 - *COPE guidelines are the global standard. Absence of ethics policy = no enforcement*
- **No plagiarism checking policy or software mentioned**
 - *Every legitimate journal uses iThenticate, Turnitin, or similar tools and states this*
- **No retraction policy — no mechanism for correcting flawed or fraudulent articles**
 - *COPE recommends clear retraction procedures. Predatory journals avoid retractions to protect volume*
- **Authors cannot contact the editor directly — only a generic webform or no-reply email**
 - *Transparency and author communication are hallmarks of legitimate publishing*
- **Journal does not require ethical approval declarations for clinical/research articles**
 - *IRB approval and ethics declarations are required for most human/animal research*
- **No authorship policy — no criteria for who qualifies as an author**
 - *ICMJE authorship guidelines should be referenced and followed*

- Journal allows one person to be listed as the sole author on clearly multi-person research
- Data availability policy is absent — no requirement to share research data
 - *Open science standards increasingly require data availability statements*
- Journal is not a member of COPE, OASPA, or any recognized publishing ethics body
- Articles contain figures or images copied from other sources without attribution
 - *Plagiarism extends to images and figures — predatory journals never check*

✓ SECTION 7: Green Flags — Signs of a Legitimate Journal

Look for these positive indicators when evaluating a journal. A genuine journal will show most or all of these. The more green flags present, the more confident you can be in the journal's legitimacy.

- ✓ ■ Journal is listed and verifiable in DOAJ, Scopus, WoS, PubMed, or EBSCO
 - *Always verify independently — never trust the journal's own claim*
- ✓ ■ Registered ISSN verifiable at portal.issn.org
- ✓ ■ Crossref DOI membership — all articles have working DOIs (verify at doi.org)
- ✓ ■ COPE membership or stated COPE guidelines compliance (publicationethics.org)
- ✓ ■ Clear, documented peer review process with defined timelines
- ✓ ■ Editorial board with verifiable ORCID iDs and active institutional affiliations
- ✓ ■ APC fee clearly disclosed upfront before submission
- ✓ ■ Articles have author ORCID iDs displayed on published pages
- ✓ ■ Journal uses iThenticate or similar plagiarism detection and states this in policies
- ✓ ■ Clear retraction/correction policy with examples of retractions published
- ✓ ■ Long publication history with consistent, on-schedule issues
- ✓ ■ Journal is archived in a digital preservation system (PKP PN, LOCKSS, Portico)

QUICK VERIFICATION GUIDE — Where to Check

What to Verify	✓ Legitimate	✗ Predatory
Scopus Indexing	✓ Found at scopus.com/sources	✗ Claimed but not listed
WoS Indexing	✓ Listed at mjl.clarivate.com	✗ Logo displayed, not listed
Impact Factor	✓ Verified at Clarivate JCR	✗ Self-claimed or fake IF
ISSN	✓ Verified at portal.issn.org	✗ Fake or unverifiable ISSN
DOI	✓ Resolves at doi.org	✗ Missing or broken DOI
DOAJ Listing	✓ Found at doaj.org search	✗ Claimed, not on DOAJ
Editor Identity	✓ ORCID + institutional page found	✗ No ORCID, no profile

Review Time	✓ Weeks to months with feedback	✗ Days, no feedback
APC Disclosure	✓ Clearly shown before submission	✗ Hidden until after accept
Beall's List Check	✓ Not listed on beallist.net	✗ Listed as predatory
COPE Membership	✓ Found at publicationethics.org/members	✗ Not a COPE member
Publisher Address	✓ Verifiable physical address	✗ No address or fake location

AUDIT SCORING GUIDE — How Predatory Is This Journal?

0–3 Red Flags	LOW RISK	Journal shows mostly positive signs. Proceed with standard due diligence. Verify indexing claims independently and review one published issue before submitting.
4–7 Red Flags	MODERATE RISK	Proceed with caution. Contact the editor directly, request sample review reports, and independently verify all indexing claims before submitting or investing further.
8–14 Red Flags	HIGH RISK	Strong indicators of predatory behavior. Do not submit. Do not pay any APC. Consult Beall's list and report to your institution's library or ethics committee.
15+ Red Flags	PREDATORY	This journal is almost certainly predatory. Do not engage. If you have already submitted, contact your institution immediately. Report to COPE, DOAJ, and your funding agency.

ESSENTIAL VERIFICATION RESOURCES

Resource	URL	Purpose
Beall's List	beallist.net	Check if journal/publisher is flagged predatory
DOAJ	doaj.org	Verify Open Access journal legitimacy
Scopus Source List	scopus.com/sources	Verify Scopus indexing claim
WoS Master Journal List	mjl.clarivate.com	Verify Web of Science listing
ISSN Portal	portal.issn.org	Verify journal ISSN registration
Crossref DOI Lookup	doi.org	Check if DOI resolves correctly
ORCID	orcid.org	Verify editor/author identity
COPE Members List	publicationethics.org/members	Verify COPE ethics membership
SCImago Journal Rankings	scimagojr.com	Verify SJR metrics (Scopus journals only)
PubMed NLM Catalog	ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nlmcatalog	Verify PubMed/MEDLINE indexing
Think. Check. Submit.	thinkchecksubmit.org	Researcher guide to evaluating journals
OASPA Members	oaspa.org/members	Verify Open Access publisher membership
Retraction Watch	retractionwatch.com	Check journal retraction history

Is Your Journal at Risk of Being Flagged as Predatory?

Many journals unknowingly fail legitimacy checks due to technical gaps — missing DOIs, no COPE compliance, incomplete metadata, or poor OJS configuration. A proper audit can identify and fix these issues *before* they damage your reputation or get your journal flagged or de-listed.

How Yogesh Helps Journals Achieve & Maintain Legitimacy:

■ Full Legitimacy & Compliance Audit	End-to-end audit against DOAJ, Scopus, COPE and indexing standards with a written gap report
■ Ethics Policy Setup (COPE Compliant)	Write and implement peer review policy, retraction policy, plagiarism policy, and authorship guidelines
■ DOI & Crossref Integration	Assign real, resolving DOIs to all articles and deposit metadata to Crossref — a basic legitimacy requirement
■ ISSN Registration Guidance	Help obtaining and correctly registering your ISSN — verifiable at portal.issn.org
■ OJS Technical Compliance Setup	Configure OJS correctly for Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Scopus metadata standards
■ JATS XML Production	Article-level structured XML — required for major indexes and a mark of professional publishing
■ DOAJ Application Support	Full preparation and submission — DOAJ listing is one of the strongest legitimacy signals
■ Scopus Indexing Preparation	Full CSAB criteria preparation for journals ready to apply for Scopus indexing

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■ <https://digitalbisht.com>

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■ New Delhi, India | 62+ Journals Launched | 30+ Scopus Indexed

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